DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 251 SP 034 277

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TITLE Are Mentor Teachers Teacher Educators?
INSTITUTION National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, East Lansing, MI.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO NCRTL-RR-92-11
PUB DATE Nov 92
NOTE 24p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, 116 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034 ($6.05).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alternative Teacher Certification; *Beginning Teacher Induction; Educational Practices; English Instruction; *English Teacher Education; Higher Education; *Mentors; *Professional Continuing Education; *Program Effectiveness; Secondary Education; Teacher Educators; Teacher Persistence; Teaching Experience
IDENTIFIERS California; *Protege Mentor Relationship

ABSTRACT

The Mentor Teacher Program in the state of California is designed to retain capable teachers by expanding their rewards and opportunities. This report focuses on the character and quality of mentoring in an alternate route program sponsored by a large urban school district. A 30-hour required training course for mentors introduces them to their new role and provides skills and strategies they can use in their work. Three cases of mentoring, all involving English teachers at the secondary level are described, analyzed, and appraised. The influence of mentor training on mentor's practice is traced and the problematic consequences of that training are pointed out. To learn more about what mentor teachers do when working with beginning teachers three sources of data were examined: (1) a training manual; (2) transcripts of conferences between mentor teachers and teacher trainees; and (3) interviews with mentors about those sessions. Results suggest that the traditional supervision of student teachers is more similar to than different from the mentoring of alternate route candidates; and this kind of mentoring may not offer any improvement over the more traditional methods of teacher supervision that it is intended to replace. (Contains 15 selected references.) (LL)

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Office of Education Research and Improvement

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ARE MENTOR TEACHERS TEACHER EDUCATORS?

Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Michelle B. Parker, and Kenneth Zeichner

Published by

The National Center for Research on Teacher Learning
116 Erickson Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034

November 1992

This work is sponsored in part by the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, College of Education, Michigan State University. The National Center for Research on Teacher Learning is funded primarily by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent the position, policy, or endorsement of the Office or the Department.

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[1]Formerly known as the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (1985-1990), the Center was renamed in 1991.

Abstract

This report focuses on the character and quality of mentoring in an alternate route program sponsored by a large urban school district. In it the authors describe, analyze, and appraise three cases of mentoring all involving English teachers at the secondary level. They trace the influence of mentor training on mentor's practice but point out problematic consequences of that training. Finally, they suggest that this kind of mentoring may not offer any improvement over the more traditional methods of teacher supervision that it is intended to replace.

ARE MENTOR TEACHERS TEACHER EDUCATORS?[1]

Sharon Feiman-Nemser, Michelle B. Parker, and Kenneth Zeichner[2]

Created by the same omnibus piece of education legislation, the Teacher Trainee Program[3] and the Mentor Teacher Program in the state of California have developed within the broader national debate in the United States about enhancing the teaching profession. The Teacher Trainee Program in California addresses a chronic teacher shortage problem by allowing school districts to hire college graduates who lack a teaching certificate. It is an alternative to issuing emergency teaching credentials to individuals who lack any formal teacher education. Supporters argue that the program helps upgrade the quality of the field by attracting talented candidates with strong academic credentials and relevant work experience.

If the Teacher Trainee Program, like other "alternate route" programs in the United States,[4] is designed to help *recruit* capable people into teaching, the Mentor Teacher program (also a statewide program in California) is designed to help *retain* capable teachers by expanding their rewards and opportunities. In the rationale for the mentor program, the California legislature declares its intent to "provide incentives to teachers of demonstrated ability and expertise to remain in the public school."

The requirements of the Teacher Trainee Program intersect with the inducements of the mentor teacher program to form a structure of support for beginning teachers. The legislation requires school districts implementing a teacher training program (ie., an alternate route program) to assign a mentor teacher to each trainee. The legislation also allocates funds to school districts participating in the mentor teacher program, $4000 stipends for district-designated mentors, and an additional $2000 per mentor to cover the

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[1]This is a revised version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Boston, April 1990.

[2]Sharon Feiman-Nemser, professor of teacher education, is a senior researcher with the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. Michelle B. Parker, assistant professor of urban teacher education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is a former research assistant with the Center. Kenneth Zeichner, professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a senior researcher with the Center.

[3]Later legislation changed the name of the Teacher Trainee Program to the District Intern Program. This report is based on data gathered in 1987-1989 when the original name was used.

[4]These alternative route programs are widespread across the United States and are somewhat similar to the Licensed Teacher Scheme in the United Kingdom (Wilkin, 1992). In both cases, the teacher's formal education for teaching takes place almost entirely in the schools.

costs of implementing the program (e.g. substitutes, released time, travel). The mentors' primary responsibility is to guide and assist new teachers.

An Improvement Over "Sink or Swim"

While concerns about recruitment and retention provide a large part of the motivation for the Teacher Trainee and Mentor Teacher Programs, they also reflect a growing recognition that new teachers have two jobs when they enter teaching—carrying out the job they have been hired to do and learning to do that job (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989). If this is true for those who have already completed a preservice program, including a stint of student teaching, it is certainly true for those with no previous professional preparation, such as candidates enrolled in the Teacher Training program.

The idea of assigning mentor teachers to work with beginning teachers is gaining acceptance, even in a profession where norms of autonomy and noninterference protect the right of beginners to "sink or swim" in the privacy of their own classroom (Devaney, 1987). Providing support and assistance to new teachers is seen by many as a clear improvement over the more typical pattern of isolation, survival, trial-and-error learning that characterizes the entry of most beginning teachers into teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1983). But what form should that support and assistance take? To what extent do the expectations, approaches, and content of the assistance vary with the background of the candidates and the contexts where they work? As programs for beginning teachers proliferate, it becomes increasingly important to conceptualize the "curriculum" of teacher induction and to consider the role of mentor teachers in helping novices learn to teach.

This report grew out of our efforts to learn more about the contribution of mentor teachers to the learning of beginning teachers in the Teacher Trainee Program of a large urban school district in California. In this school district, teacher trainees teach full time in junior or senior high schools while participating in a two-year, district-sponsored training program leading to a teaching credential. Mentors work with 1-4 trainees while continuing to teach 60 percent of the time. We wanted to know what the face-to-face, close-to-the-classroom work between mentor teachers and teacher trainees was really like and how that work added up as preparation for teaching and professional socialization.

Limited Help From Extant Research

What do we know about the role of experienced teachers in the preparation of beginning teachers in alternate route programs? What forms of "guidance" and "support" do mentor teachers offer novice teachers? Studies of alternate route programs generally cite

the contribution of mentor teachers as a key to the program's success, but say little about the specific nature of that contribution.[5] Even studies which claim to look "beneath the surface . . . to the heart of what programs . . . actually do and to whom" (Adelman, 1986, p. 55) report limited data. For example, on the basis of interviews with administrators and program participants in an exploratory study of seven alternate route programs, Adelman (1986) concludes that alternate route programs provide more field experience and more intense supervision than traditional teacher education programs. She also notes that clinical supervision is the preferred supervisory model.

Even when researchers focus on a single program, they rarely provide more than surface information about what mentor teachers do. An evaluation of the California Teacher Trainee Program (Wright, McKibben & Walton, 1987) reports how many times each teacher was observed, the length of the observation, the frequency of conferences and the most frequently discussed topics. We learn, for example, that observations tended to be brief and infrequent and that face-to-face discussions occurred mostly on an as-needed basis. Mentors reported that classroom management was the most common focus of assistance followed by lesson planning. Asked whether the assistance had a positive impact on their teaching, 84 percent of the teacher trainees said they had been helped. Based on such findings, the researchers conclude that "*guidance and assistance from experienced teachers added to their own effectiveness as teachers, according to many of the trainees*" (McKibben, Walton, & Wright, 1987, p. 29, emphasis added)

Studies like these tell us a great deal about the character and quality of the *practice* of mentoring, especially as it is carried out with novice teachers who lack formal teacher preparation. Neither do they help us understand what the labels—"assistance," "support," "guidance," "clinical supervision," and so forth—stand for in particular situations.[6] What do such novice teachers need to learn? How do their mentors help them to learn to teach while teaching? How do mentor teachers enact a new role for which no real precedents exist? This report was motivated by these questions.

Sources of data. To learn more about what mentor teachers do when they work with beginning teachers, we examined three sources of data: (1) a training manual (Little &

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[5]For an exception see Stoddart (1990).

[6]This study is part of a larger comparison of supervision or "guided practice" in alternate route and induction programs. In this report, we concentrate on how mentor teachers in this one urban school district guide the practice of teacher trainees. In a second report we compare the character and quality of the guidance trainees receive with the character and quality of guidance received by beginning teachers in a university and school district- sponsored induction program (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992).

Nelson, 1990) assembled by the Far West Laboratory out of materials developed by the school district for the core training of new mentors; and (2) transcripts of conferences between mentor teachers and teacher trainees; and (3) interviews with mentors about those sessions. These data were collected by researchers from the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning at Michigan State as part of a larger study of teacher education and learning to teach. In this report, we look at each source of data for information and insights about the work of mentors and teacher trainees.[7]

What are Mentors Taught to Do?

A 30-hour, required training course for mentors in this urban school district introduces mentors to their new role and provides skills and strategies they can use in their work. The training connects views about teaching and learning to teach with specific procedures and techniques that can be used in face-to-face, close-to-the-classroom work. Created by the district's professional development staff, the training stresses the idea that research presents valid knowledge about teaching which can be passed on to novices along with the accumulated wisdom of practice.

Because the work of mentoring differs from the work of classroom teaching, it is thought to require new and different skills. Mentors need preparation in ways to help novices handle their typical problems: "classroom management, basic lesson design and delivery, evaluating student progress" (Little & Nelson, 1990, p. 2). Since mentoring is more than passing on a "bag of tricks," mentors must be able to "describe and demonstrate underlying principles of teaching and learning." They also need to learn how to "talk clearly and straightforwardly about teaching without offending the teacher" (Little & Nelson, 1990, p. 4).

Elements of the training correspond to the six sections of the *Leader's Guide* (Little & Nelson, 1990): Orientation to the Mentor Role; Assisting the Beginning Teacher; Classroom Organization and Management for New Teachers; Classroom Consultation, Observation, and Coaching; Mentor as Staff Developer; Cooperation Between the Administrator and Mentor. Each section is broken down into specific training segments with activities, handouts, and directions for how teachers can practice particular skills in their school. We concentrate in this report on the first four sections of the *Leader's Guide* because they bear more directly on close-to-the-classroom work between mentors and novice teachers.

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[7]For a list of publications from this larger study, contact the NCRTL at Michigan State University, College of Education, 116 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1034.

Mentor Training

In "Orientation to the Role," mentors are welcomed to their new responsibilities and assured that they are taking on a very important job. Testimonials from veteran mentors provide descriptions of the "wonders and traumas" of the work. Presentations by state and local officials clarify the procedures and guidelines to which they must adhere. There are workshops on leadership styles and "survival skills," such as how to balance classroom teaching and mentoring responsibilities, and a review of the "elements of good teaching" as identified by teacher effectiveness research. The training design assumes that mentors bring with them a grasp of recent research on effective classroom teaching because of their previous participation in district skill-building workshops.

In the section called "Assisting New Teachers," mentors learn about typical problems beginning teachers face. They hear suggestions about ways to be helpful (e.g., develop a resource file of materials for beginners to use; hold an orientation to explain procedures such as filling out grade reports), and they discuss the issue of developing relationships with novices.

The section on "Classroom Management and Organization" introduces mentors to "well-tested, practical programs" derived from classroom-based research on effective management. Planning checklists for separate areas of management (e.g., organizing the room, developing a workable set of rules and procedures, monitoring student responsibility, planning activities for the first week, maintaining management systems, organizing instruction) are distributed.

In "Classroom Consultation, Observation and Coaching," mentors learn about "tested techniques of classroom observation and feedback." This section rests on the view that, since teaching and learning take place in classrooms, teachers must see each other working in classrooms with students in order to be helpful. Much of the material in this section comes from the literature on coaching (e.g., Joyce & Showers, 1988) and clinical supervision (e.g., Acheson & Gall, 1987).

One workshop offers a general framework for talking about teaching regardless of grade level or subject. The framework combines the common features of "effective" lessons with six levels of thinking derived from Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives. The framework could be used to structure observations and conferences and to help novices learn how to plan "effective" lessons.

Mentors also hear about the value of "scripting" lessons when they observe. Besides preserving the sequence and context of the lesson, a "script" is seen in this training program

as easier for teachers to accept because it provides an objective, nonevaluative record of classroom transactions.

Since observation is only useful if it leads to thoughtful discussion of actual teaching, mentors hear about ways to structure conferences. Numerous handouts accompany this part of the training. They include a list of coaching skills (eg., active listening, passive listening), a list of feedback techniques (e.g., elicit feelings, avoid giving direct advice, provide specific praise), a list of "opening" questions ("How do you feel about my coming to observe the lesson?" "Did the students respond to you as expected?") and "focusing" questions (e.g., "Why do you think so many students came up to you when you were at the reading table?" "How could you make your directions a little more clear?"). Pointing to the importance of these skills for mentors, the *Guide* states:

> Asking mentors to observe and be observed, we are asking them to do something that is at one and the same time important and *difficult*. Getting close to the classroom means getting "close-to-the-bone"—talking to people in detail about their ideas and performance. (Little & Nelson, 1990, p. 10)

Commentary

As seen through the *Leaders Guide*, the training for new mentors promotes a view of mentoring as a technical activity that can be controlled by applying specific strategies and techniques. The training downplays the "wisdom of practice" in favor of procedural knowledge derived from research. Presumably these procedures can be applied to generic problems experienced by generic beginning teachers.

The picture of effective mentoring parallels the image of effective teaching as embodied in direct instruction. Teachers must learn to manage instruction; mentors must learn to manage conferences. Organized around a nonevaluative anecdotal record or "script,"the effective conference is one in which the mentor sets the agenda, directs the conversation, provides most of the data, and determines the outcome.

Reading the *Leaders Guide*, one gets little sense of teaching as an intellectual or moral activity. Issues of student learning, diversity, curriculum, assessment rarely come up. Nor do questions about purposes—the teacher's or the mentor's. The training gives the impression that goals are unproblematic and given, whether in teaching or mentoring. Finally, it is curious that a program premised on the valued contribution of experienced teachers pays so little attention to mentors' own ideas about teaching and learning to teach. The training runs the risk of de-skilling mentor teachers by substituting neutral procedures for collective practical intelligence in the solution of practical problems.

Three Examples of Mentors At Work

We wanted to go beyond this glimpse of how mentors were prepared for their work and examine the character and quality of mentoring as it was enacted by some of the participants in this particular teacher education program. For one day, researchers followed mentors as they observed and conferred with secondary English teacher trainees. We interviewed both mentor and teacher after the conference, probing their reasons for actions and statements. We will now briefly examine three different cases of mentoring in this school-based urban teacher education program.

Case #1: Candace and Kevin[8]

Before the observation, Candace, the mentor, tells the researcher that she has been helping Kevin develop a "weekly program" and think about where to find materials. When she observes, Candace says, she looks for "teacher direction" rather than independent seatwork because "remedial students" need the teacher to model oral language. Candace thinks that Kevin has changed a great deal since the beginning of the year. "He has more of a class routine and he doesn't base his lessons as much as he used to on personal opinion." Candace sees her role as helping Kevin move away from basing lessons on personal opinion. She makes suggestions and tries "to question him so that he defines for himself what it is that he's basing his approaches on."

The observation. While Kevin teaches his eighth-grade remedial class, Candace "scripts" the lesson. Kevin begins by telling students to write a story about a train wreck, making it up or drawing on something they had seen. While he takes role, fills out tardy slips, and distributes books, students write.

After 20 minutes, Kevin reads a list of 10 study questions which go with the next story they will read. "The questions should give some background for the story and give some reasons why we should read it . . . and should care about this story," he explains. Students quiet down as Kevin writes the questions on the board. Some require factual recall (e.g., "Tell how Ivanov saved the train from being wrecked"), interpretation (e.g., "Why is Ivanov's job important?") and imagination (e.g., "Think of another way Ivanov might have saved the train"). Kevin explains what each question is getting at, then students copy the questions into their notebooks. The explanations and copying take the rest of the class period.

The conference. Candace starts the conference by complimenting Kevin for displaying a list of classroom rules. Then she turns to the opening activity, asking whether

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[8]Names of mentors and teachers are pseudonyms.

students had read about or had any recent experiences with train wrecks. Kevin responds that the assignment was "just an introductory thing." Trying to place the exercise in the larger context of writing, Candace asks whether students ever do brainstorming or the clustering of ideas and whether they ever work in small groups and pairs to revise their work. Again Kevin says they do so with longer assignments, but that this was "just an introductory thing."

Although Candace seems unhappy with Kevin's response, she moves on. Complimenting Kevin on his study questions, she reminds him that the school has a copy machine which would save students from having to write the questions down. Kevin explains that he didn't have the questions ready in time.

Next Candace asks Kevin whether he has students read aloud or silently. Kevin explains that he generally has students read the story silently, answer questions, then read the story and their answers aloud. "Which way do you think students get more out of the story?" Candace asks. "All three," Kevin replies. The students are "very visual and kinesthetic. They like to do copy work but reading is much more difficult." Candace does not probe this statement or open up a discussion about student learning. Instead she compliments Kevin for showing sensitivity to the attention span of "these young people" by varying the activities.

Candace brings up several more topics, finding something to praise, then asking Kevin about his practice. Then she gets him to consider how well his lesson fits with the components of effective lessons endorsed by the district.

Candace: I was thinking about your lesson today. Um, our writing, your little, well, the thing that, how would that fit in here? Where would you think it would fit best?

Kevin: That's an introductory thing. That's before the, um [looking at the sheet which details the steps of the teacher-directed lesson plan].

Candace: So, it'd be somewhere up here at the beginning?

Kevin: Yeah, it's before the, um, right before the initial instruction.

Candace: Okay. And then the guided group practice would be?

Kevin: The guided group practice is gonna be doing the study questions. . . . The independent practice will probably be questions nine and ten on the guide. We'll finish off tomorrow, then they'll do

their homework. The remediation or alternative activity will probably be the game on Thursday.

Candace mentions that the students are "nicely behaved," then asks Kevin about his seating arrangement. "Do you assign seats?" (No.) "Does it work well letting students choose their own seats?" (Yes, because if students misbehave they know they will be moved away from a friend.) Candace comments that the girls and boys sit separately and asks Kevin whether he ever puts "an on-task girl with a couple of off-task boys?" Kevin agrees that mixing up the boys and girls would work but that, for now, students are behaving. The conference ends without any sense of closure.

Comments to the researcher. After the conference Candace tells the researcher that she would like to have seen "a lot more teacher involvement [in the lesson] than I saw today. I felt that there needed to be more student-teacher interaction." Still, overall she is pleased with the conference and the lesson. She senses that Kevin is beginning to think about his teaching in more detail and follow a sequence. She is pleased with his lesson planning, especially the use of an introductory activity. She is glad that Kevin is teaching vocabulary and using prewriting activities for longer assignments.

Commentary. It is hard to tell what Candace is trying to accomplish in this conference. One senses her discomfort with some of Kevin's practices, but each time she seems to accept his explanation. Kevin is unlikely to think critically about the bases for his approaches without more discussion of the issues raised by what he does and does not do. The whole conference has an artificial quality. Candace and Kevin seem to be going through the motions without taking the content seriously. Does it matter that Kevin has an introductory activity, if the activity itself has limited educational value? Is it important that the lesson provides guided practice, if that means copying down questions which the teacher could xerox? By her silence on these matters, Candace seems to be endorsing these activities as acceptable ways for students to spend time in school. While Candace uses some of the specific strategies introduced in the mentor training—scripting the lesson, asking focusing questions, offering praise—it is hard to connect them with an educative purpose.

Case #2: Rita and Chad

The observation. Rita, the mentor, watches as Chad's eighth-grade remedial English students, composed mostly of Latino males, file in. Chad divides the students into two groups, keeping one and sending the other to work with an aide. For most of the period, both groups read a play aloud, with each student taking a part. Since the activity ends before the class is over and Chad has nothing else planned, students visit until the bell rings.

The conference. After class Rita and Chad sit down to discuss the lesson. Rita opens the conference by asking Chad how he felt about what had happened. "It was comfortable," Chad replies, adding that the lesson fit the looser structure characteristic of his Friday classes. Chad then comments on differences in the two groups:

Chad: I was very disappointed to find out from my aide that when she gave directions to the second reading group, two students refused to read and one of them is a very bright student.

Rita: Maybe they were a little disappointed that you were not with the group, you know that it was little less important perhaps. You can't worry about that—maybe not breakfast, maybe too much breakfast, you know, you don't know what is going to happen.

Chad: But I felt good in my own group with the fact that [name of student] whose reading ability is the weakest of all ten members of the group was the one most anxious to read.

Rita: That's great.

Chad: He asked to be the narrator and he also read two parts.

Consulting her notes, Rita begins her commentary on the lesson. She tells Chad that dividing students into groups is good as long as there is an aide. Alternatively, Chad could put two students in charge of assigning parts and directing the reading so that he could circulate. Rita praises Chad's new room arrangement, saying she likes where he put the overhead and podium, and how he darkens the classroom when students enter. That helps students calm down and focus on the activity. She says she plans to try that in her own classroom.

Since the play is part of a unit on winning and losing, Rita says somewhat tentatively that Chad might have made the connection explicit. "If there had been a moment maybe just to say, 'Now this story ties into this unit, we're talking about winning. Is this man losing because he can't read?'" Before Chad can respond, Rita retracts the suggestion on the grounds that it does not fit with the "loose" Friday structure. Chad agrees, then wonders how much this story about an adult learning to read fits with the family backgrounds of his students. Rita and Chad agree that many of the students are probably the first generation to be literate (in English). Rita points out that students probably hear at home the same kinds of speeches—"of laying down the law"—delivered by the father in the play. Chad is

excited that one student, probably the first reader in his family, has "picked up that it's important to be able to read." Chad mentions that one student corrected another's reading and Rita comments, "It's nice to let students correct each other instead of having the teacher make all the corrections."

Turning again to her notes, Rita says, "I just have odds and ends I wrote down." She likes the fact that Chad took the parts of the women in the play to show male students that it was "an OK thing to do." She confesses that she wondered whether the activity would take the whole period. She thought Chad could have stopped before the last act and asked students to do some writing. "You could even ask, 'How do you think the story will come out? or, What is this character going to do through the story?'"

Chad likes the idea and laments the fact that he and the aide had not agreed to that. Rita elaborates on the idea, suggesting that he could have put students in pairs and asked them to create some dialogue between characters and then had students study punctuation and grammar from what they write.

> I don't think in a group like that you can expect too much. They're not going to write another act; they're not going to be able to do that I don't think. But you could say, "The story up until now talks about," or "Find an adjective as you're going back over it that describes each of the characters." . . . And that's an easy way to get a little bit of grammar in without having to teach grammar. They accept it differently. Sometimes I think we have to play their game.

Rita praises Chad for selecting an "up-to-date" play and using a different format on Fridays. Then she comments that Chad probably felt "uncomfortable" about running out of things to do. She has brought a folder of "sponge activities," things that teachers can use to fill up time. Chad admits his discomfort, saying he probably should have had the students read for half the period and then do some writing. Pursuing the idea of writing, Rita asks if Chad uses "clustering" or brainstorming, prewriting activities in which students gather their ideas with the help of peers before starting to write. Chad says he does.

Rita compliments Chad on his calm manner with students. "At home someone is always yelling at them all the time." She suggests that they work on lesson planning next time. Chad admits he has trouble with planning and budgeting time. Even though he teaches the same grade level, the students differ so much in terms of their abilities that he has to plan different lessons. Rita acknowledges the problem and suggests he look at some new anthologies of short stories and new grammar books that the school recently received.

Afterwards, Rita tells the researcher that she thought the conference went well though she wishes Chad would bring up problems. Perhaps, she reflects, "I'm in there too soon that I don't give him a chance." Overall, she is pleased with Chad's progress.

> I think that he now accepts we all have problems and it's not an easy job and the more we can work together and share materials and share ideas . . . and we have talked at one of our last sessions about working through a lesson, a unit plan, on "educational decisions" . . . he seems more eager now to say, "Fine. Let's get together and talk about whatever problem it is."

Commentary. Because Rita dominates this conference, we learn very little about Chad's thinking. Nor do we learn the reasons behind Rita's praise, questions or suggestions. What ideas about the relationship between writing and reading or about student learning lie behind Rita's suggestion that Chad stop the reading so that students can do some writing? Rita tends to link students' actions and feelings to external factors (e.g. a darkened room, an overhead projector) rather than to issues of curriculum and student learning. She misses a chance for such a discussion when Chad comments on how students' in the two groups responded to the playreading activity.

Most disturbing is the way Rita reinforces a deficit view of the students' families and home backgrounds and promotes low expectations about what they can be expected to learn in school. She tells Chad not too expect too much from the students and supports his assumption that their parents are illiterate. Neither Rita nor Chad express any appreciation for the knowledge and cultures that students bring to school or consider how they can use these perspectives to enhance learning. The conference reinforces the view that the main task in educating eighth-grade remedial students is to keep them happily occupied in activities that give the appearance of learning.

Case #3: Lila and Clark

Leaving her own class with a substitute, Lila, the mentor, comes over to Clark's school to observe his fifth-period class and talk to him during sixth period. As he teaches his eighth-grade class of ESL [English as a second language] students, described by Lila as "medium low and low," she takes notes. "I just put it down very dispassionately," she explains to the researcher,

> nothing with a lot of adjectives, just statements of things that were occurring, comments about the material, comments about the way he presented it,

comments about the students and their reactions, comments about the whole period and how it went.

The observation. As students enter, Clark directs them to copy the sentences on the board and correct the punctuation and capitalization while he takes roll. After reviewing the sentences orally, Clark turns to the main activity of the period—reading aloud from "Will Stutely's Rescue," a Robin Hood tale in an anthology of American literature. Every few paragraphs, Clark stops, asks some recall questions and then ends up paraphrasing the passage. As the period progresses, students become restless and fidgety and most stop paying attention to the story. With 10 minutes to go, Clark give students 10 words from the story to define and use in sentences.

The conference. Lila begins the conference by telling Clark "some positive things I saw," but quickly raises her first concern. She praises Clark for using a "dispatch" activity at the beginning of class, then observes that students took too long to settle down. When Clark tries to explain that his students are "hyper," especially after lunch, Lila suggests that he have students read a novel of their choosing as a different "dispatch" activity. Lila later tells the researcher that she has been trying to get Clark to do this since the beginning of the year.

Next Lila warns Clark not to let students get out of class so easily. One boy had entered the classroom with his shirt half off, and Clark had sent him to the bathroom to fix it. That kind of incident will give students the idea that they can get away with doing silly, distracting things, Lila tells Clark. She also tells him not to talk over students or recognize anyone who calls out answers, both behaviors Lila noted in the lesson. Rather Clark should get students to listen before he speaks and encourage them to raise their hands.

Turning to the main activity of the lesson, Lila compliments Clark for reading the story aloud "because the language is very difficult" but asks whether a more accessible version of the story is available. Lila tells Clark that the students, not the teacher, should do the paraphrasing. She also thinks that the reading went too long, resulting in a "one-dimensional lesson."

Lila believes that every English lesson should have a balance of reading, writing and speaking. "They [students] should be writing every day about what they are reading," Lila tells Clark. If Clark stopped the reading sooner, students would have had more time to write and not just sentences with vocabulary words. Lila suggests pairing students up to work on the discussion questions.

Next Lila focuses on the questions Clark posed at the end of the reading: "Should Robin Hood be taking from the rich to give to the poor?" She thinks it would make a good

journal entry, but Clark plans to use it as the basis for a discussion because "it will help students connect the reading to their own lives." He wants students to think about what would happen if Robin Hood were living in America today, taking from the rich to give to the poor. Lila worries that students will not see the moral dimension. "In reality," she tells Clark, "some people are richer than others and students need to realize that reality even though they may not like it."

Lila returns to the question of finding suitable materials, suggesting that the next story might come from a different anthology. As a former reading coordinator, Lila knows what books are available and has made frequent suggestions to Clark about using alternative texts. Today she tells him to use an anthology called *Literature Scope* which has stories that are "high interest and low level" without being watered down. Clark interrupts to say that he is planning to use "Wise and Weak," a story about a gang. He assumes that students will be interested because of their familiarity with gangs.

Comments to the researcher. After the conference Lila reiterates her concerns to the researcher. She wishes Clark would use texts that the students could comprehend. She thinks he should rely less on whole-group discussions and have students work in pairs or small groups to answer discussion questions. Finally, she worries that the students missed the moral dilemma posed by Robin Hood's actions. "Is it okay," she asks, "if somebody is rich to take his money just because he's rich? These kids can relate to that because many of them do come from low-income homes. Might they think it is okay to knock on their neighbor's door or barge in and take something just because the neighbor has more?" Sighing, Lila sums up her sentiments to the researcher: "I try to reinforce the good things, but I'm getting a little weary because a lot of [my] suggestions are not implemented. I mean *a lot*."

Commentary. Drawing on her own knowledge and experience, Lila tries to influence Clark's practice by suggesting more appropriate activities and materials. We know that Lila has made similar suggestions before. We don't know whether she has linked them to ideas about curriculum and learning. Lila says that every English class should have a balance of reading, writing and speaking activities. Why does she think that? Where does this idea come from? Is Lila expressing her own personal views, the position of the district, the collective wisdom of the field? By not connecting her suggestion to "best practice," Lila may inadvertently reinforce the belief that what teachers do is a matter of personal preference.

Lila's concerns for the lesson run the gamut from "classroom management to materials to methods to time allotment." She seems frustrated that Clark has not taken full

advantage of her expertise. Uninterested in Clark's explanation, she offers her opinions on everything without delving into anything. Rather than treating her notes as something she and Clark can study together, Lila uses them to remind her of all the points she wants to make. Though Clark has access to her accumulated wisdom, one wonders whether he is learning to think critically about his own teaching.

Comparative Analysis of the Examples

Common Topics

In terms of content, the three conferences reflect some common views about good English classes. All three mentors believe that students should do some reading, writing, and speaking in every English class. They also seem to share a general orientation to writing which comes through in their questions about prewriting activities and suggestions about journals and other assignments that reinforce the reading-writing connection.

All three mentors emphasized issues of classroom organization and management, stressing the importance of having an opening activity, filling up the time, and getting students' attention before proceeding with the lesson. Usually they treated these matters separately from considerations of curriculum or student learning. One exception is the implication from Lila that students would settle down more quickly if they had novels of their own choosing to read.

The value of small-group work is a third common thread. All three mentors suggest some form of small-group work for writing and discussion. We can also see common patterns in the way mentors structured the conferences and used particular strategies and techniques. All three mentors scripted the lessons they observed, then used the script as an agenda. Rather than identifying a basic question or issue to discuss in some depth, they all walked through the lesson, commenting or questioning the trainee on each part. By talking about so many things, they never probed anything.

Mentors structured the conferences and dominated talk. They asked all the questions, made most of the statements, offered all of the suggestions. Not only did they begin the conference with a compliment, they sought opportunities to offer praise.

The Influence of Training

We can clearly trace some of these commonalities to the content of mentor training. If the point of the training was to get mentors to treat particular topics or use particular strategies, then these examples offer evidence that the training was a success.

But the examples also document how the procedural orientation of the training narrowed thinking about the value of particular strategies and limited the treatment of certain issues. For example, all the mentors used praise without explaining the bases for their assessments. All the mentors scripted the lessons but did not analyze the scripts to identify patterns or underlying issues. All the mentors suggested strategies for managing students but they rarely connected the issues of student attention and involvement with the nature of the academic tasks provided to students.

Missed Opportunities

The conferences reveal little about what the beginning teachers are thinking. That is because the mentors seem relatively uninterested in probing their ideas. Mentors do not find out what their trainees know about their subjects, their students, or the curriculum. Nor do mentors share their own *thinking* about the lesson. What do they think about the value of the content, the appropriateness of the teaching, the likelihood of learning? Though they give suggestions and materials, they do not provide a rationale or make explicit the connections they see.

In this way, beginning teachers in these three cases miss opportunities to develop sound reasons for what they do, to learn principles of teaching, and to think about ways to represent knowledge to learners. By not learning about the rationale and sources of mentor's ideas, they may also continue to regard their suggestions as expressions of personal preferences rather than collective wisdom about good practice.

Conclusion

This study has raised many questions in our minds about how to regard the support and guidance that mentor teachers in this one urban school district give teacher trainees. Clearly the teacher trainees are learning to teach. What they appear to be learning about teaching though, makes us question whether it is appropriate to regard these mentor teachers as field-based teacher educators and their work as a form of "clinical teacher *education*." The focus in these three cases of mentoring on performance—and not on the ideas behind a teaching performance—and the lack of connection to helping pupils learn worthwhile things makes it difficult to consider this mentoring as legitimate instances of teacher education.

When we began this inquiry, we wanted to describe the character and quality of mentoring by providing a grounded picture of what mentor teachers do and what they talk about with teacher trainees in a particular alternate route context. This was the first step

in comparing the work of mentor teachers in this school district with the work of university supervisors in a regular teacher education program. Along the way, and before we got to our comparative case study analysis, we uncovered some intriguing similarities between mentoring in this alternative route program and the supervision of student teachers as it is described in the literature. For one thing, the Mentor Teacher program is organizationally separate from the Teacher Trainee program, making it difficult for mentors to know about what teacher trainees are learning in the formal components of their program. The same condition exists in many preservice programs where cooperating teachers know little if anything about what student teachers learn on campus.

Second, studies of student teaching supervision (e.g. Zeichner, Liston, Mahlios & Gomez, 1988) point to the lack of attention to student teachers' purpose and goals, to the content of what is being taught, and to what pupils are in fact learning. Our discussion of mentor training and our examples of mentors' practices suggest some of these same characteristics of "guided practice" in this one alternate route program. While we cannot draw any firm conclusions from such a limited number of examples, the hypothesis that the traditional supervision of student teachers is more similar to than different from the "mentoring" of alternate route candidates is worthy of consideration.

The assumption that the activity of mentoring necessarily facilitates the ability of beginning teachers' to understand the central tasks of teaching and to engage in pedagogical thinking (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987) is problematic given our analysis of these three cases of mentoring in this one urban school district. Mentoring as it is currently carried out in some school districts may not offer any improvement over the more traditional methods of teacher supervision that it is intended to replace. More attention needs to be given to the specific ways in which mentors are prepared for their work and to making the reality of mentoring more in tune with the rhetoric of mentoring (Little, 1990) than it appears to be in these cases.

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